On the Sunday before Thanksgiving I was sitting in the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates. I was meeting with four University graduates who work in that most fascinating city.

The four graduates were Farah Al Hinai A’99, ’99, M’04, who came to the University from Oman; Rachid Abu Hassan ’00, an acoustics engineer from Lebanon; Faisal Al Saja A’01, ’02, a banker from Saudi Arabia; and Mohammed Ali A’05, ’06, who is a native of Dubai and works in information technology. Faisal’s wife, Gulru Kutluk M’01, who came to the University from Turkey and now works in human resources at the United Arab Emirates University, was unable to join us.

Talking about the Commons residence project and the Integrated Science, Engineering, and Technology complex from some 7,000 miles away was an exhilarating experience for me. But it was even more thrilling to listen to these former students describe how they are using what they learned at the University to help improve the world through careers that touch on almost every facet of business life in Dubai.

You can probably tell that I was bursting with pride for the University of Hartford. What I was experiencing that evening was the clear sense that the University of Hartford is more than living up to its mission of preparing students for careers as active and productive citizens. We are sending our graduates all over the world to become leaders in shaping tomorrow.

That is what the community leaders who founded the University 50 years ago were aiming for, although they were thinking more immediately about serving the Greater Hartford region. In the intervening 50 years, the University has grown physically and intellectually. It has changed from a university for students commuting from the Greater Hartford region, to a largely residential university for students from across the United States and around the world. The university those leaders founded has expanded to encompass a graduate program of increasing stature and prominence. But along the way, it has never lost its fundamental mission: to be a private university with a public purpose.

If you know anything about the history of higher education, you know that since the close of World War II, it has been characterized by the rise in prominence and popularity of public higher education. From the University of Connecticut to the University of California, public universities have grown in size, in stature, and in their places in American public life.

Yet when our founders conceived of a university for Hartford, they chose to found a private university. They didn’t go to the legislature and say, “Give us a public university,” as leaders of so many other cities did. They said, “We’ll do it ourselves. We’ll bring three small schools—the Hartt College of Music, the Hartford Art School, and Hillyer College—together, and we’ll form our own university.”

I can’t think of a more shining example of New England self-reliance. The founders took it upon themselves to found, raise money for, and build a university. They saw themselves as the guardians of tomorrow, and they accepted the responsibility, as citizens of Hartford, for founding this University.

That sense of self-reliance and service has characterized this University ever since. We continue to serve the Hartford community in ways too numerous to do full justice to here: from the Community Division of The Hartt School, which provides performing arts education and training for 3,000 children through adults every semester; to the Micro Business Incubator on Albany Avenue, where Barney School students provide valuable consulting services for small-business owners; to Project Horizon, which places our nursing students in homeless shelters throughout Hartford.

The best example of this service to our community is our connection with the public school system. No other private university of our size has such a deep and abiding connection. Each semester, over 300 of our students provide a wide variety of services to students in nine schools in the city of Hartford through Educational Main Street. And, of course, the University is home to two magnet schools—University of Hartford Magnet School (from early childhood to fifth grade) and University High School of Science and Engineering. No other private university
In talking with graduates from our earliest classes to recent graduates, like those in Dubai, I hear the same themes: close relationships with the faculty have changed the lives of our students. Their relationships with faculty and their friends here have helped form their personalities and prepared them for meaningful careers and lives as citizens in a democracy.

— Walter Harrison, President

Letters...

The following excerpts are from a letter the Observer received in response to our summer issue:

TO THE EDITOR:
I read with sadness and fond memories of the passing of Jackie McLean in your last issue.

I was a senior accounting major in the business school in 1979 when I was fortunate to have Jackie as my teacher. Back then, Jackie was a “legend” within the University community, as were the courses he taught at The Hartt School that were available to the larger University.

One of Jackie’s very popular courses was Black Music since 1950, and it was sold out every time. Most of us had to wait until our senior year for the Jackie experience. The class was a mix of students from all different majors and schools.

Jackie often played albums or cassettes and told us to listen to the words—but there were no words. . . . He also played his saxophone for us sometimes. He used words like “cool” and “hip-hop” as he taught. For most of us, who were used to more traditional courses, this was a welcome change.

Jackie breathed life into the classroom and brought an appreciation for the music that he wanted all of us to share. He offered us the opportunity to be exposed to the music and to the history of the music in a way that many of us would never have received otherwise.

And so, 27 years later, I am still a Jackie fan. My taste in music is jazz, which Jackie professed was so “American” and so special. How right he was. What Jackie didn’t teach us, but we learned anyway, was just how special he was.

Regards,
Bennett Shuldmann
Class of ’79
Partner, Deloitte, & Touche LLP

EDITOR’S NOTE:
We received this encouraging note along with a contribution to the magazine:

The summer issue of the Observer was the finest I’ve seen in over 30 years. Keep up the good work.

Lew Krupka
Class of ’68 and ’72